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The Courage of Faith

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*Greetings
from
Mr. and Mrs. R. E. Bishop*

The Courage of Faith

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PROCESSION OF DOCTRINE

By

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The Courage of Faith

Today we are going to explore the depths of our doubt. Perhaps you may imagine that you are free from doubt; there are those who boast of such a disposition. But today we are going to embrace our doubts, accept them, that we may put them in their place—not to repress them, nor deny them, but to strengthen our faith in spite of them. It is said of the Apostle Thomas that his doubt has done more for man than all the so-called certainty of the other disciples.

In the Axiom Book, the book you all love so much, the statement is made with authority, "There is no doubt in this book." But the problem is that doubt is not in the book, but in oneself. And you cannot triumph over doubt unless you recognize it in yourself. Certainly there is no doubt in Truth; but if you do not face it in yourself, how can you deal with it? And if you do not know the nature of your

doubt, how can you ever triumph over it? The answer is not in repressing doubt, nor in denying it, but in courageously facing and overcoming it. And unless you do face it and recognize it, unless you can look at it squarely and honestly, you cannot estimate it, nor overcome it.

A person who boasts that he is free from doubt is only being gullible about his own faith. And, more than this, he does not really know what true faith is, for in faith there must always be an "in spite of" aspect; otherwise it is not faith, but authority. We are not told that we need to eliminate anything, but we must illuminate everything. This is the miracle we hope to perform today, not by repressing nor denying doubts, but by illuminating the mind to show the real strength of faith.

Do you think that putting doubt and faith together in the mind is presenting contradictions? Paradoxical perceptions, perhaps, but not contradictions. Someone said to me the other day, "I do not want to be a doubting

Thomas!" It is better to be a doubting Thomas if you know how to use your doubts, as he did, than to be one of the Pharisees who were so sure of themselves that they really knew nothing about true faith at all.

Do you know what it would be if all your doubts—and the possibility of doubt—were eliminated entirely from faith? Well, actually, you wouldn't have faith at all, but certainty; and certainty, unless backed by truth, would simply be a fanatical attitude. The certainty of pride is not really being free from doubt, but, rather, repressing the possibility of real knowledge. There is a very important place for his doubts in the constitution of every man.

What are the doubts that confront you? They are called temptations to faith, trials to faith; and if you do not know how to meet these temptations to faith, these trials of your faith, you do not know the strength of your faith. No one could ever know his strength if he did not know his weaknesses. Denying, simply denying and repressing, and refusing to

face weaknesses, is not the answer. But being able to estimate your weaknesses enables you really to know your strength.

Today we enter upon what has been called the new phase of our Christian journey, a forty day passage away from sense knowledge—sense knowledge which is what people think is most conclusive. Certain knowledge is considered to be knowledge formed by the senses, you know. People feel very sure about anything they can handle, and see, and smell, taste, and feel; these seem their certainties. Yet the advance of philosophy, and now the advance of scientific research, has exposed the fact that sense evidence is frequently unreliable, and that if you see a thing, you can very well have your doubts about it. Sense knowledge used to give a feeling of great certainty; if there was something sure, it was experienced by the senses. But there has come an evolution in the consciousness of man that reverses this sense of sureness, a deeper awakening, shall we say; and these forty days that we are now entering

upon, show us that magnificent and miraculous transition from sense knowledge and its definite limitations, to the evidence presented by faith. Faith is the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for.

We see this illustrated by the Disciples and those closest to the Lord, called the Apostles, who had physical contact with Him; those who had been able to hear Him and see Him and touch Him over a period of years. There came a time when the evidence that had been gathered through the senses had failed them. They were not able, through their senses, really to know what manner of man He was. At first they had felt quite certain about Him and what they could expect of Him; they felt quite sure that they knew their Master, the man.

There is something about sense knowledge that gives you only a surface aspect of life, but this is not full and true vision. The senses make us aware of what seems to be, but we fail to recognize Reality Itself.

So today we enter upon a very important phase of our religious journey. It is called the "other side" of Easter, for you cannot have the complete Easter perception unless you have the vision of Low Sunday also; for actually they are but one disclosure. You have in Easter the height and the triumph of faith, the enthusiasm of faith; but if you do not know the temptations to faith and the doubts that beset faith which are presented in Low Sunday, you do not know, really, what your faith is. Actually, there is no true faith, without the courage to face doubt. Of course we can swing the mind's pendulum to the maximum and the minimum of doubt and faith, but we cannot eliminate entirely either end of the swing. You cannot completely eliminate doubt from faith, nor faith from doubt. Doubt and faith are inseparable. If you did not have some doubt, you would not really know the nature of faith because faith is not the absence of doubt, but is the ability to courageously triumph over doubt. The ability fully to estimate the weak points

in believing, helps you to make use of these doubts to strengthen faith. The reason for this paradox is because you could not have doubt were it not for the fact that you have faith. There must always be some faith in doubt. And there is also always some doubt in faith.

Today we are going to make use of the wonderful faculty that our Creator has bestowed upon us, a faculty that empowers us, as rational creatures, to surmount the obstacles of doubt encountered in our path of faith, that we may be strong, not weak. Our need is to penetrate that veil of seeming formed by sense evidence and discover, in the invisible, what really is.

The Disciples had their faith put to the test. They saw their Lord crucified, taken down from the Cross and buried. Then there were some who discovered Him afterwards, walking about and talking. They were so filled with excitement and reverence; it is said that they worshiped Him. But He knew their minds, and He recognized that some doubted. For there can be no true faith without underlying doubts.

The construction of faith consists of two definite elements: the first, participation, and the second, separation. Without these two elements there is no faith. Participation and separation! The Disciples had had their participation, but they did not really know their faith until they had experienced also, separation.

We want you to realize how important is this part of the liturgy which we are entering upon, called "Low Sunday." To have courage in separation is of tremendous value. The low points in life are extremely educational. The strength of your faith must be able to meet doubt and go on into the unknown, into the mystery.

You all know so well the story that is told in the Instruction about the disciples who followed their master because of his promise that He would lead them to the Isle of Jewels. But as they traveled, they became so weary that he took compassion on them and provided them with a wonderful, but magic, city. And, oh,

they were so enthusiastic about this magic city; it seemed to offer everything that they had ever wanted! The answer to all their needs and problems was right here in the magic city. Their senses were satisfied with their surroundings; they saw what seemed to them to be all they needed. Then the call came to move out of this place of seeming security, this place of comfort where they were surrounded with all their fulfillments. They were called out of this city to follow their lord and master into the unknown, into what looked to them like a desert, a realm of great uncertainty, out into that beyond that lies in the realm of mystery, traditionally called the desert, the place of nothingness.

This story is applicable because there are many who cling to the sure things that seem to be so vital and important to a surface life. So when the call came to move out on this educational march into the unknown, many held back and were afraid, afraid of the experiences that they had not yet met, the un-

known, that which lies beyond in the realm of mystery.

Our mental equipment has its limitation because we are finite beings. Sense knowledge certainly is full of limitations. Your instruction has already explained the mental limitations which envelop the senses. These senses are but instruments, but their greatest limitation is rooted in the mind. Actually, it is the mind that sets the boundary line of limitation in all knowledge; it is the mind that makes limitation regarding man's powers. Man can reach and progress only to the extent of that depth of recognition within himself. Actually there are no outside limitations; the limitations are all mental and within. Every spiritual candidate, and every other candidate for knowledge, must first break through the limitations which his mental boundaries have established. Physical vision is in the senses, but true spiritual vision must ever be in one's understanding. The physical limitations of our senses are easily recognized; but mental limitations, not easily

recognized, are far more dangerous. The more the mind deepens in perception, the greater is the sense evidence expanded, until finally one becomes aware of the vast area that lies beyond the senses. It is only the person who does not know himself who thinks sensing is knowing, and is boastful about his certainty.

The removal of limitations to spiritual knowledge is a great step, for here is the realm of true mystery! The real candidate is not afraid of this. One is only afraid of it when he has not learned the courage of facing doubts.

Today we are moving out upon a seasonal plateau of mystery—the transition area between sense knowledge that depends upon what seems to be real around us—that we may penetrate into the area beyond the magic city into that place where we know the true strength of our faith. We can do this only when we have our doubts. This is the transition, the point of transition between sense evidence and faith, our evidence of what is not seen. As the philosopher said, "If you see it, it isn't so." And

the physicists are confirming this by saying that the invisible is the real world. Therefore for our security we must have more than sense knowledge.

Our new platform of vision, true vision, is called understanding. We are about to penetrate from what seems to be so real, to what is really real—that place where our true seeing is understanding; that place where we face and penetrate the limitations of our mind—that place where we understand the nature of our limitation, both in the natural order and also in the supernatural order. Instead of trying to repress doubts, or deny them, we accept them and estimate them. Knowing all this, we are ready to welcome the realm of mystery that lies beyond, where the real wisdom is, a department of understanding beyond the natural grasp of one's faculties. This is the place where we experience the true exercise of faith, so important to all worthwhile explorations. This is faith that knows how to make good use of doubt. Fanatics are not really without doubts;

they have only repressed them so completely, refused to recognize them, that they really depreciate the value of faith.

The chief character for Low Sunday is the Disciple Thomas who has come down through the pages of history as "The Doubter." The Church Fathers have recognized his importance to the whole system of faith—his doubt has been more important to faith than has the mere acceptance of the other Disciples.

If you can recognize yourself as the "Doubting Thomas," you are all right, because then you will know what to do with your doubts; you will know how to put them in their place—which is not denying them and not repressing them to the point of fanaticism, but using them to test and strengthen faith.

What does the Apostle Thomas really mean to you? Is he just a character out of history? He is much more than this. You can study him, you can read about him and listen to the stories about him; but unless you can see these things in relation to yourself, the study

is empty. It must always come back to you. Ask yourself, "What does this mean to me?" Well, there is a little of the "Doubting Thomas" in every student of truth—unless he is fanatical. Some degree of doubt is in everyone. Even though you are fanatical and will not admit to doubt, still there is a taint that is recognized in even the most fanatical faith. It is important to recognize our limitations if we are to triumph over them.

What does this "Doubting Thomas" attitude in you mean to you, and how are you going to put it to good use? By properly orienting it in relation to your faculties. Thomas represents the doubt that is in every person who has accepted faith as his evidence of things not seen. Each person must come to the point where he puts his faith to the test, his faith is ever on trial lest it be shaken to its foundations. So many things happen in this world of experience! Something may happen that seems to take the props right out from under a person's sense of security. How he meets this is

his gauge of faith. To go on in the practice of faith, still to accept faith, even when shaken, is your real test.

This was the situation which confronted Thomas. He was still among the close Disciples, one of the Apostles—that is, he became an Apostle—he was not ostracized from the group because he expressed doubt. He alone was willing to confess his weakness, and therefore made use of it; he did not even try to repress it, he faced it, he knew how to face it, he turned it over to the Lord.

Almost every (well, let's say "every," because I think it will be a truer statement) candidate of this Instruction has had moments when the foundation of his faith has been shaken. I know of two times definitely when the foundation of faith in this Instruction was shaken, when something happened that people did not want ever to face: the idea seemed impossible that those wonderful two who represented this Instruction could ever die. But wasn't this the

same kind of a situation that faced the Disciples? They saw their Lord die, and they saw Him buried; and they were shaken in their faith. There isn't one person in the world who, if he saw the resurrected Lord or anyone else, would be able to accept the evidence of his senses; he would need the evidence of things not seen to credit the miracle with authority. Miracles such as this may be on every side; but most would be missed, for no one could ever recognize immortality until he himself had triumphed over the limitations of mortality in himself.

When faith is put to the test, then only it is that one knows the strength of faith; only then it is able courageously to triumph over the trials of shaken foundations. Is your faith equal to the test of contradictions in appearances? If you do not have the kind of faith that is able to triumph over doubt, you do not have the power to put doubt in its place. Signs and visible proofs are not adequate evidence; the senses are not absolutely compelling evidence.

Man is a rational creature, a rational human being with free will. Hence the Lord never compelled him to believe anything. He has given His Word, He has given evidence, He has given signs, He has given proof; but He has never compelled any one to accept truth. If He compelled you to accept His signs or His proof or even the evidence presented to the senses or to faith, then it could not be said that He had given you the ability to use the gift of free will which He has provided for you. This gift becomes your standard equipment, your rational free choice, the power of acceptance in you; because you yourself choose truth.

People can listen to the Word of Truth, they can see miracles performed, and still not accept; acceptance is something within. Accounts of this kind fill history. Even in the time of our Lord's ministry, miracles were performed without acceptance. For a moment, people were enthusiastic; but they soon forgot, or something came along that shook their faith.

They were ready to believe for the moment, but just as ready to disbelieve when their foundations were shaken. It has been said with authority that if they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one arose from the dead; and this is proved. Have you ever heard the explanations offered in the realm of religion for some of the miracles? In many schools of religion they try to account for the empty sepulchre by fantastic explanations—amazing explanations—all because people cannot accept anything other than sense evidence.

The Low Sunday message is not a contradiction of faith; it is the strengthening of faith, for our Lord said, "Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed." Are you able to face your doubts and triumph over them right at the place where you doubt? A little more courage perhaps about our "Doubting Thomas" nature would save us from despair.

It is well to note also that the doubt of Thomas was not a complete *disbelief*. It was

not refusal of belief, but a recognition of weakness in faith. Thomas' doubt may be compared to that of many—of most of us, really—who suffer temptation to our faith. And who has not, in his faith, been tempted by doubt, by testing places where his faith is shaken? The feeling is, "I have lost faith." But he could never have doubt if he did not primarily have faith; you must have faith to have doubt. This is important to recognize.

It is also important to look into ourselves, be honest in our scrutiny to discover our doubts instead of trying to deny them or suppress them. Honesty helps us to face them and use them. If you want to sharpen a knife, you whet it against something that seems in opposition to it; you strop it on something. It is the same with faith, you give it keenness when you whet it against sense appearances.

Real vision, keen understanding, needs the ability to penetrate the surface of experience. If you want real understanding, penetration, you must look beyond what seems real to what

is really real; you must use the sword of insight, sharpened, keen, and whetted against all contradictions. Then only is it equal to the temptations that spring up on every side.

When temptations rise against your faith, when things happen that seem to shake you—maybe some great disappointment appears in what you have hoped for—perhaps it even seems as though your Instruction has let you down, and you have the feeling, “Oh, I’m lost, I’ve lost my faith, my Instruction has not supported me.” I have heard such complaints as this over the telephone and in face to face interviews—the cry of despair from the depths of the heart. But when directed properly, it is a healthy cry. Can you believe this? For it is at this point, when people have had their greatest disappointments, that the real help is available. But here one thing more is necessary, and that is perseverance in faith. Real faith does not give up easily. It has a certain momentum which carries on in practice. This is illustrated by Thomas—he still belonged to the circle of

Disciples; and faith, even heavy with doubt, carried him along over the rough places until the real value of his faith transfigured his doubt.

As we said before, Thomas’ doubt has done more to strengthen our faith, and the faith of every one, than the certainty of all the other Disciples. He continued in the practice of faith just as though he had all he needed, although in his heart there was a cry that he wanted some greater kind of evidence. Take careful note of this fact, that even though the Lord condescended to give him what he asked for—sense evidence—that actually, even the touching of the Lord was in itself no more convincing than his faith, the evidence of things not seen or touched. Faith is a special kind of evidence, a special kind of touching of situations; no matter how wonderfully certain we feel sense evidence to be, faith is more wonderful for it gives a spiritual conviction.

“Doubting Thomas” represents the everyday struggle that every one is engaging in within himself, the continual struggle between

doubt and faith. Thomas was honest about his doubt, he didn't try to suppress it, he didn't try to deny it, he didn't let it fester in his experience to project into fanaticism or hypocrisy. He was victorious in his battle because he offered his doubt to the Lord, laid open his problem, and asked for help. His reward was an understanding vision which gave him evidence of what he could not see but could understand.

Tradition states that he saw one thing and believed another. He penetrated sense evidence—even touching the Lord. But touch alone would not have been truly convincing. His mind opened to the revelation, and he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" He saw the man, but he recognized Reality Itself; he saw Jesus, but he believed God; he saw man and believed the resurrected Lord. He had made use of his doubts regarding sense evidence to strengthen his faith in the invisible. The two elements so important in faith met in him to perfect balance

—participation and separation were no longer contradictions.

Let us consider these two elements. First, there is no faith without participation; second, there can be no faith without separation. Faith is the perfect balance of participation and separation; they are not contradictory points of faith, but actually perfectly harmonized. You could not have faith in God unless you had God in you to believe. Do you think you could ever believe any of the mysteries of truth if you did not have a corresponding truth in you to accept? Only God can really believe God. Actually it is God in you that believes in God. This is participation, the first element of faith. Then, second, for faith to be merely faith, there must also be separation. Separation is the element of faith which constitutes its "otherness."

Today we stand at that junction point between participation and separation. Let us remember they are not two experiences, but two aspects of the same vision. Faith is projected

from a background of doubt. Separation draws us back from sense knowledge and its limitation while participation provides a new kind of evidence which is called faith.

Faith is the training point so important to every candidate—that he shall know and feel and experience the strength of participation because he has the courage to accept separation.

What actually happens is that we are able to put separation in its place. Doubt is defined as "lack of faith;" yet faith does not eliminate doubt, rather it illuminates it. We need to illumine the elements of faith, for to eliminate these elements would be to destroy faith. How is this accomplished? By understanding first that there is no faith without participation and, second, that faith would cease to be faith if separation were eliminated. He who has faith must be separated in feeling from that which he has faith in, otherwise it would attain the authority of being. Faith itself is the triumph in spite of doubts. Hence also there is no faith without separation. Both

of these elements are important; sometimes certainty conquers doubt, but it does not eliminate it. Sometimes doubt overwhelms certainty, but faith is still present. This twofold aspect in the rational faculty must be understood and accepted—only then can we have the triumphant factor called courage. Courage does not deny doubt or separation; it takes doubt into itself as evidence of its own limitation. Courage does not need the safety of absolute certainty; it includes the sense of risk and mystery without which there is no truly dynamic life.

It is well to remember that faith is not a doubtless certainty, rather is it the courage to accept truth when the mind cannot comprehend it. Even in the saints, doubt has to be met in the guise of temptation which seems to increase in proportion to their saintliness.

Thomas, named "The Doubter," personifies all that we have stated about faith. His faith included doubts about itself and also the courage to take these doubts to the Lord. This is the risk of true courage. Let us recognize the

"Doubting Thomas" in ourselves, and let us turn to our Lord Jesus Christ and say to Him, "Thou art my Lord and my God." Let us look at the Lord and not at ourselves when we feel disappointed in our lack of faith. Like the saints, let us meet doubt as a temptation which increases in intensity as we increase in the power to triumph over it.

How many times have we been tempted to act as though the Lord were our God in some things and not in others? Henceforth let us put our doubts in their place, and use them as a springboard upon which we may leap into the realm of the mysteries beyond what seems real, that we may participate in what is really real. Thus may we receive the Lord's blessing upon those who have not seen and yet have faith.

*All the Presence there is,
All the Power there is,
All the Consciousness there is,
Is *Love, the Living Spirit Almighty.*

GENEVIEVE BURNELL

*AXIOMS: Book of Health by
George Edwin Burnell
page 80



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